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CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

CONFIDENTIAL ANNEX

TO

C.O.S.(61)38TH MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY, 20TH JUNE, 1961

1. BERLIN CONTINGENCY PLANNING

(Previous Reference: C.O.S.(61)34th Meeting, Minute 9)

LORD MOUNTBATTEN, welcoming Sir Frank Roberts and Sir Christopher Steel to the meeting, said that the most urgent problem before the Committee at present was that of Berlin Contingency Planning. He invited Sir Frank Roberts to give his latest assessment of Soviet aims and intentions over Berlin. He hoped that subsequently both Ambassadors would remain when the Committee went on to discuss the future of Berlin Contingency Planning.

A. Soviet Aims and Intentions Over Berlin

SIR FRANK ROBERTS said that he believed the West should be guided by the basic assumption that Khrushchev had meant exactly what he had said at his recent meeting with President Kennedy and subsequently; i.e. he would take action with a view to resolving the Berlin problem from his point of view before the end of 1961. Whilst he had offered to negotiate over Berlin, there was reason to believe that he no longer expected or even wanted such negotiations. It seemed probable therefore that at the Communist Party Congress in October, 1961, if not before, he would announce the summoning of a peace conference to which both parts of Germany and all the nations who had fought against Germany in the last war would be invited. If the Federal Republic of Germany and the West generally declined to attend this conference, the Russians and their satellites would proceed to sign a separate peace treaty with East Germany alone. Once this treaty was concluded, the Russians would make it plain that thereafter the West must deal with the East Germans over access to Berlin; it was probable however that the Russians would urge the East Germans not to go out of their way to make difficulties, at least at the outset.

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A number of factors had probably combined in leading Khrushchev to take this line. First, he had initiated the present Berlin crisis in November 1956, and was being criticised at home because as yet he had made no progress. Secondly, the flow of refugees from East Germany was having serious consequences. Thirdly, the Russians were probably genuinely concerned about the policy which might be followed by future governments of the Federal German Republic; it was probable that their primary aim was not so much to get Western troops out of Berlin as to put us in a position where our presence in Berlin could do the Russians less damage.

As for the situation within the USSR and the state of public feeling there, Russia was certainly becoming steadily stronger economically, apart from difficulties over agriculture, and the younger generation especially were conscious of this and of their great achievements in science and technology. The resultant confidence, combined with reduced fear of the USA, could be dangerous. Recent events in Cuba, which had shown that the USA were not prepared to take strong action even on their own doorstep, whereas the USSR in similar circumstances would certainly have done so, had made a profound impression. These factors had probably led Khrushchev to believe that he could pursue his aims over Berlin without risk of war.

SIR CHRISTOPHER STEEL said that the official German attitude to the question of Berlin and on German reunification was frozen because of the elections which were due in September, 1961. He believed that in the past few years German opinion generally had accepted that there was little hope of achieving the reunification of Germany on acceptable terms, unless there was a major shift of the balance of forces in the world.

The Germans certainly believed that if Berlin was lost to the West, morale not only in Western Germany but in the free world at large would suffer a severe blow. They would not regard the signature of a peace treaty between the Communist bloc and East Germany as constituting the loss of Berlin, and indeed in that event they would expect access for civilian traffic to continue very much as at present. However they would expect their Allies to react strongly to unilateral action by the Russians over Berlin, especially if military traffic was obstructed; but since they were officially excluded from Berlin Contingency Planning they could if they wished adopt an ostrich-like attitude.

THE COMMITTEE:-

- (1) Took note

B. Procedure For Future Planning

LORD MOUNTBATTEN recalled that the Committee, whilst fully endorsing the concept of a probe to establish Soviet intentions, had always taken the view that land operations on a large scale were militarily unsound and, moreover, could not succeed in their object unless it was made clear that they were backed by the threat of nuclear striking power and that the West was in all respects prepared to go to war. They had, however, been restrained by Ministers from making their views known in full to General Norstad lest he should gain the impression that we were dragging our feet; moreover, in view of the structure of this contingency planning there had been no requirement to express United Kingdom military views direct to the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The point had now been reached where a frank statement of the United Kingdom's attitude to the military aspects of Berlin Contingency Planning could no longer be delayed. The Minister of Defence had accepted that this was so, and was prepared to take the matter up with his colleagues. The Committee should therefore now consider the lines on which they should recommend the Minister to proceed. The Committee would have seen the Telegrams* in which Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh had reported on his recent talks with the State Department in Washington, and he (Lord Mountbatten) invited him to make a statement on these talks.

SIR EVELYN SHUCKBURGH (Foreign Office) said that one of his main objectives in his Washington talks had been to bring about an exchange of views between the United Kingdom and United States Chiefs of Staff. He had told Mr. Kohler frankly that we regarded the military plans produced by Live Oak as unsound and counter-productive. The Pentagon's view was that Live Oak was the proper forum in which to thrash out any difference of view which existed on these military plans. He had succeeded in showing Mr. Kohler that plans produced by Live Oak were prepared at the instance of General Norstad himself and that such plans did not represent the agreed position of the tripartite military authorities nor of the Governments. The Americans argued that there must be a series of military plans between a preliminary probe and all-out war which should provide for a number of measures involving a progressive degree of force, thereby compelling the Russians to take a series of decisions, each more dangerous than the last.

In discussion the following points were made:-

- (a) Mr. Khrushchev had stated that there would be no blockade of our troops in Berlin, but that we should have to arrange our access to them through the East German authorities; if, however, difficulties were placed in our way, and we then used force, we must expect to be met by force. There was much to be said in these circumstances for the garrison airlift plan, which would compel the Communists to take the first warlike action if they wished to interfere, and the Americans seemed now to accept this.
- (b) The East Germans were unlikely, for political reasons, to interfere with essential civil traffic between West Germany and Berlin, and the need for the civil airlift was unlikely to arise. They might, however, by carefully selected and progressively applied measures of control, attempt to orientate West Berlin's economy away from the West and towards the Soviet bloc.
- (c) There was reason to believe that General Norstad's own views on measures to restore ground access were in some ways very close to those of the Committee's; on the other hand, he was currently thinking in terms of a corps operation along the autobahn, a concept which, in the Committee's view, was even more unsound than the divisional operation. There was no evidence to show to what degree General Norstad was guided by instructions from the Pentagon.

* Washington to Foreign Office Nos. 1470, 1485 and 1500

- (d) The Americans were strongly in favour of full German participation in Berlin Contingency Planning. The Committee also were now of the same opinion since the security objections no longer had the same force. There was reason to believe that the French would also agree.
- (e) The conflict of views between the United Kingdom and the United States on these matters could only be resolved at a high level, preferably by discussions between a representative of the Committee and equivalent representatives of the United States, France and Germany; General Norstad should also participate. The Live Oak forum would not be suitable since its level was too low, but SHAPE might be a suitable venue since talks held there would not necessarily disclose their substance.
- (f) It must be recognised that military plans were but a part of the problem and must not be considered in isolation. However, since the Americans had said that they were not ready for wider discussions there was a case for making a start on the military side.
- (g) The main difficulty over the proposed military talks, apart from the venue, was the question of how they were to be arranged and who should take the initiative. If Ministers approved that they should take place, and that the United Kingdom should take the lead, it would be best for the Foreign Office to make the initial approach to the other countries concerned.
- (h) Apart from the possible military measures which had so far been proposed by Live Oak, Mr. Acheson, after consulting General Norstad, had produced a list of a completely new class of military measures. These would be intended to act as a deterrent to unilateral Russian action over Berlin, and to convince the Russians of Western determination to go to war if necessary, rather than to restore the situation after access to Berlin had been obstructed. These new measures, which were at present in the form of a list of possibilities rather than of a plan, would have more chance of achieving their object if the Russians came to know of them through their intelligence sources rather than through open pronouncements by the West. The proposed military talks should cover this new class of measures as well as the former.
- (i) In assessing the prospects of deterring the Russians from unilateral action, it should be borne in mind that the new Berlin crisis was different from previous crises in that Mr. Khrushchev was more openly and publicly committed to his policy.

- (k) It was believed that President Kennedy understood that Berlin Contingency Planning on its present lines was unlikely to carry conviction with Mr. Khrushchev, and that only an obvious state of readiness for full-scale war on the part of the West was likely to make any impression. Whilst the President had probably not yet settled his policy, it seemed unlikely that he would accept the full list of measures proposed by Mr. Acheson, but rather would seek a less drastic programme whilst retaining the same objective.
- (l) A wide field of non-military measures had been considered at official level on a tripartite basis. Some of these measures could have a highly damaging effect on the Soviet bloc, although their effect should not be over-estimated. The ultimate aim should be to produce a comprehensive and concerted plan for submission to the Governments concerned, covering the whole field of military, political and economic measures which could be taken. The preparation of this plan could best be undertaken by the Ambassadorial Group in Washington. The effect of the progressive implementation of this concerted plan should be such as to leave the Russians in no doubt of Western determination to go to war over Berlin if necessary. This comprehensive plan must be thought right through to its probable consequences and to the likely reactions of the other side and of world opinion.
- (m) It chanced that later in this meeting the Committee were to consider, amongst other subjects, planning for military intervention in Laos the stationing of a semi-permanent garrison in Zanzibar; and the possible need to reinforce Northern Rhodesia. All these contingencies would involve the dispersal of United Kingdom forces in a way which, if we were to adopt the Acheson concept of deterrent measures, ran counter to the dispositions which we should then make.

Summing up, LORD MOUNTBATTEN said that their submission to the Minister of Defence should include an historical review of the development of Berlin Contingency Planning, and should emphasise the views which the Committee had consistently put forward. They should say that they had discussed the matter with the Ambassadors in Moscow and in Bonn, and with Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, and had heard a report of the private views of General Norstad. They should then inform the Minister of their opinion that high-level military talks with the Americans, the French, the Germans and General Norstad should be held at an early date, and should recommend that the United Kingdom should take the initiative in this matter, having in mind that this was a first step towards the production of a comprehensive political, economic and military plan.

THE COMMITTEE: -

- (2) Warmly thanked Sir Frank Roberts and Sir Christopher Steel for attending their meeting.
- (3) Agreed with the remarks of the Chief of the Defence Staff in his summing up.
- (4) Instructed the Secretary to prepare a draft memorandum to the Minister of Defence accordingly, taking account of the points made in discussion, and to circulate it to them and to the Foreign Office for approval.
- (5) Took note that the Chief of the Defence Staff would subsequently forward the memorandum to the Minister of Defence.
- (6) Took note that Sir Christopher Steel would brief the Commander-in-Chief, British Army of the Rhine, and the Commander-in-Chief, Royal Air Force, Germany, on the lines of their discussion.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, S.W.1.

20TH JUNE, 1961.